Teaching students the hardest skill in journalism – how to start your story - with the help of Pulp Fiction, Forrest Gump and Cool Runnings.
This session

- Explain the hard thing and why it is hard to teach
- Show how I (try to) teach it
- You have a go
- Feedback
The hard thing...the intro

The ‘intro’ is the industry term for the first line of a text-based news story

It is crucial

Generally no more than 25 words (although house styles differ)

It should explain what has happened or what will happen

It should use as few words as possible but be as newsworthy as possible

For example...
EU referendum: Final push for votes on last day of campaign

Politicians are making their final pitch for votes on the last day of campaigning before the EU referendum.

David Cameron, Jeremy Corbyn and Tim Farron are addressing rallies arguing the UK will be better off and safer with a Remain vote in Thursday's poll.

Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage are also filling the airwaves with their arguments.
Family and friends of murdered MP Jo Cox are urging everyone ‘love like Jo loved’ as they mark what would have been her 42nd birthday.

Worldwide gatherings are taking place on Wednesday to honour the Labour politician, who was killed in the street last week.

The MP shares the same birthday with Bernard Kenny, the pensioner who was injured when he tried to save her life. He will be 78.

Organisers are hoping to show - like Jo's mantra - everyone has more in common ‘than the things that divide us’.

One of the main events will be held at Trafalgar Square and another just yards from the spot where Jo was murdered.
Monkey escapes enclosure at Howletts Wild Animal Park near Canterbury

A female monkey escaped from her enclosure at Howletts Wild Animal Park late this morning. Keepers and specialist vets were called in to catch the primate, which was spotted sitting on top of its usual home.

The Javan langur, called Malang, managed to get out of her enclosure close to the park's administrative office and pavilion restaurant.
Why is it hard to teach?

To learn how to write intros, you need a news story.

To get a news story, you need to know what an intro is.

To know what an intro is, you need to have written news stories.

To have written news stories you need to know what an intro is.
And...

The intro is the first line of a story

But it is the last part of the journalistic process

Generate story idea

Research topic

Do interviews

Gather comment/responses

Pitch to newsdesk

Write copy

If you can’t write the intro, it is not a story
The solution?

Remove the need for students to have a news story

Replace it with their knowledge of their favourite films

Based on constructivist approach: Vygotsky, Piaget, Dewey, Vico, Rorty, Bruner

New information is linked to prior knowledge

Ask them to write one line about something which has happened - or will happen - in their favourite film
Cool Runnings
A ragtag band of Jamaican sprinters have launched a fundraising appeal for the country’s first ever bobsled team.

Forrest Gump
A Greenbow man has been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honour after saving his platoon in bloody battle in Vietnam.

Pulp Fiction
A gangland hitman has been found dead at the home of missing LA boxer Butch Coolridge.
From the students...

A young girl has killed her mother using telekinesis after the pair had a fight.
Carrie

A young clownfish has been kidnapped and taken hostage by a human dentist in Australia.
Finding Nemo

A banished general of the Roman Empire has returned home to find his wife and son hanged.
Gladiator
Your turn. Five minutes. Write an intro using based on your favourite film.

➔ No more than 25 words.

➔ It should say what has happened, or will happen.

➔ It should contain the most important details.

➔ It should be as short but as newsworthy as possible.
Feedback